



**Joint Committee on Children
Tuesday, February 16th, 2016**

Good morning, Senator Bartolomeo, Representative Urban and members of the Committee. My name is Alicia Woodsby, and I'm the Executive Director of the Partnership for Strong Communities, a statewide nonprofit policy and advocacy organization dedicated to ending homelessness and expanding affordable housing to strengthen Connecticut communities. The Partnership staffs and manages two statewide campaigns – Reaching Home and HomeConnecticut focused on these goals, respectively.

I'm here today to testify in support of S.B. 10 – An Act Increasing Access to Child Care for Children Who Are Homeless. S.B. 10 would change two early childhood policies to give children experiencing homelessness easier access to child care services. Streamlining access for these children to child care will benefit both the children and their parents, and assist the household in exiting homelessness to housing more quickly.

In 2012, Connecticut's Reaching Home Campaign launched the implementation of Opening Doors –CT, the statewide plan to prevent and end homelessness that follows the federal Opening Doors plan. Opening Doors CT has engaged more than two hundred stakeholders including government and community partners, providers, advocates and policymakers, to work collectively to meet the following core goals:

- Finishing the job of ending veteran and chronic homelessness by the end of 2016
- Preventing and ending homelessness among families with children and youth by the end of 2022
- Setting a path to end all forms of homelessness

This legislation addresses important issues that now impede our efforts to stabilize the lives of children experiencing homelessness and to help parents end the homelessness of their families.

More than 1,000 families were homeless in Connecticut last year (2015), with more than 2,000 children as part of these families. Every year, some 90% of children experiencing homelessness in Connecticut are under 12, and nearly half of all children experiencing homelessness in our state are under the age of five.

S.B. 10 would give the Commissioner of Early Childhood the authority to create a "protective services" category within the Care4Kids child care subsidy program for children experiencing homelessness making them categorically eligible for the program regardless of their parent's work status. The bill also creates a 90-day grace period for providing documentation of health and immunization records when enrolling in a child care center, group children care home, or family child care home. Families are required to provide this documentation before a child can be enrolled. Often, families experiencing homeless do not have immediate access to these records. This policy change would ensure a child has immediate access to child care services in these settings while the family works to secure the documentation.



Often, families experiencing homelessness lack employment, and are struggling with extreme instability. The lack of child care makes it even more challenging for them to participate in worker training or secure new employment. For parents, immediate access to child care means that they can seek employment, participate in job training, search for new permanent housing and complete other necessary tasks to resolve their homelessness and stabilize their family lives. Immediate access to stable child care is particularly helpful for children in an episode of homelessness by providing structure and support during a very stressful and often traumatic time in their young lives.

By helping the parents focus on these critical tasks, S.B. 10 will assist providers in resolving each case of family homelessness more quickly. We know that this will benefit our public systems, like schools and emergency rooms, which are often taxed with additional demands when families remain homeless.

I hope that you will support this important legislation.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today.